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December 1991

- More Tower designs
- Crazy Eights in Ypsi
- WINTER BLUES & Jazz!
- Winter walks

and other strictly local stuff. . . .

Depot Town Rag

Volume 14, Number 12 *"All the news in one block in one month."*

A Publication of the DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI 48198

Santa Claus arrives in Depot Town at noon Saturday, 14 December

in the annual

Parade & Street Dance

described last year as "world's shortest parade!"

Maybe that's because most of the folks in town were *in* the parade, rather than watching it from the sidewalks. Assembling in Riverside Park and proceeding east toward the railroad tracks, by the time the mob reached Ninde Street the whole thing just stopped and everybody danced and waved and sang and celebrated the arrival of the Christmas season.

Some said it was refreshing to see such activities happen in the month of December, since the holiday has begun at the malls before Hallowe'en, in recent years.

New Orleans has its Mardi Gras; Key West does it on Halloween. Macy's and others hype the season at Thanksgiving. Depot Town seems to celebrate in the same mood, but in the cold, crisp month of December.

Parade and Street Dance organizer, Steve Gross of Depot Exchange Antiques, says this year's parade will be just as delightful, with the elegant costumes of Our Lady's Madrigal Singers lending a Proper Victorian Sensibility to the occasion. Not-so-proper revelry is anticipated, as well, and everyone is encouraged to come in colorful costume (any costume!) and parade and dance with the rest of the community.

Steve can be reached at 482-1780, but he also invited "absolutely everyone" to join the celebration unannounced, if they wish.

Tank cars sit on the Conrail tracks behind Fingerle Hollister Wood's lumber yard

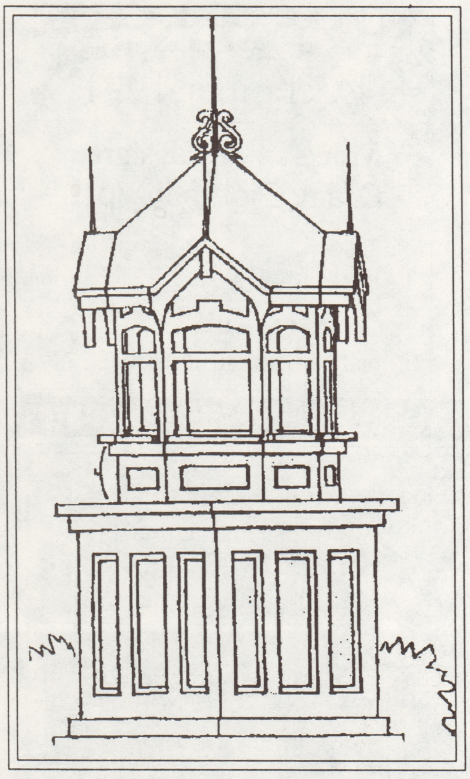
Tower replication recalls earliest industry along these railroad tracks

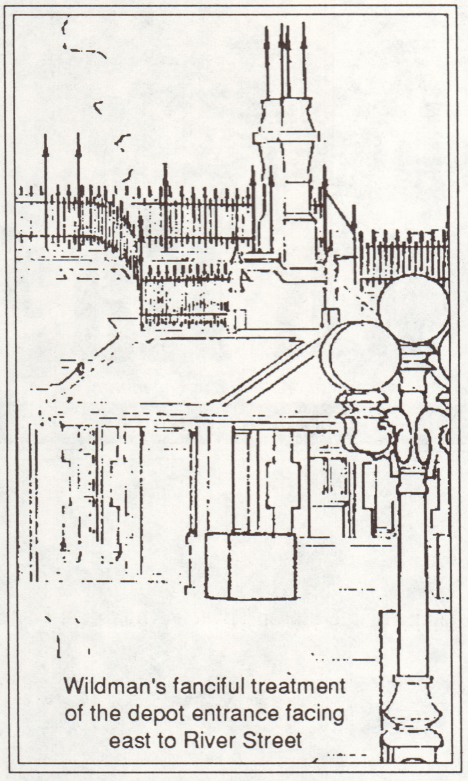
Even before the first tracks came to the railhead at Ypsilanti, the Norris Lumber Mill was established on what is today called Frog Island. In the burgeoning Michigan Territory, cutting down trees and using the lumber to build a new state was the primary effort and occupation. As the railroad came, its chief duty was to get the workers and the product back and forth from the forests to the mills and to the consumers.

That lumber cycle was made evident again this last month with the many trips to Fingerle Hollister Wood Lumber Company for the building materials for the newly replicated 1890's Crossing Guard Tower at the crux of Cross, River and the tracks down in Depot Town. F/H/W Lumber has moved from their Michigan Avenue location near the end of Miles Street to a new and much larger spot farther east on Michigan Avenue. Their efficent new location backs up to the railroad tracks -- as almost every lumber yard has throughout history -- but there's no rail siding from the main line. And there wasn't a siding at their former location, either. All their lumber, today, is delivered by truck.

"The guys from Conrail come in just about once and year and try to convince us to let them build a siding into the yard," says the helpful counterman, "but we get all our deliveries by truck now."

With tanker cars visible from behind Fingerle Hollister Wood's gigantic, new sheds, trucks are continually rolling in and out with the local lumber company's familiar motto emblazoned on their hoods: "There is a material difference." Even when the Roland Sizemore, Jr., the Antique Engine Club and their many helpers trucked lumber for the Crossing Guard Tower, that motto held true.. The material difference is felt in many of our older family businesses in Ypsilanti -- and that's why such projects as the Tower seem to make such important connections for the people who live in our community. By truck or train, it's still the old hometown ethic that makes the difference.





Wildman's fanciful treatment of the depot entrance facing east to River Street

Left: Yet another treatment for the replicated tower at the crux of Cross, River and the tracks.

Designs proliferate as tower progress continues

"Here's another idea for what you could do with that signal tower you're putting putting up out on the corner," said Bill Wildman in his most recent visit to Depot Town. Bill is a most loyal promoter of Clinton/Tecumseh's Southern Michigan Railroad and is interested in all things railroadiana. No one could replicate a hundred-year-gone piece of railroad architecture and escape his notice.

"I saw you folks working out there last Saturday when it was so cold," says Bill, "and I remembered that drawing I did of how you could improve your old depot, too!"

Bill has two versions of the Crossing Guard's Tower (this month's appelation for Our Favorite Edifice!) and the more ornate version calls to mind some of the forms incorporated in the tower at Chelsea. "These shapes weren't as hard to build as one might think," he points out, referring to an age when skilled labor was plentiful and rich design was appreciated. "Those Victorians had a flair for it."

Bill's rendition of our forlorn depot almost takes the one-story remnant back to the gaudy and crenelated three-story original -- and most of the items are available in today's catalogs of things to fasten on to restored buildings.

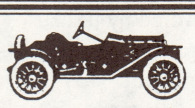
Wildman comes by the block several times each year with more updates of Southern Michigan's progress and encourages all to stop by their Clinton depot and assess their progress. New/old business cars will soon be added to their line and the fall color tour between the two cities was greatly successful.

What does Bill call the tower? "A Crossing Guard's Tower." He should know.

Progress continues in the winter cold as the Crossing Guard Tower reappears after a hundred year absence from the district.

Some think that's not too bad, since the first noises about its return surfaced in 1981. There was hope for having it in place before this year's Heritage Festival but, anyone who knows how 'things work' knows that was too optimistic. Still, several loyal supporters show up every Saturday to brave the cold and stick a few more pieces together.

Who knows? It may be in place to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of its vanishing!



T E D'S
Auto Electric
307 North River • 483-1238

Festival of Lights welcomes your contribution

Volunteerism or cash; whichever you can.

Winter walks in the old neighborhood...

. . . help to put the year's projects into perspective and settle us into a mood for planning next spring's tasks. It's too late to stop and smell the flowers, but we're right on time for plotting next year's blossoms and bulbs.

In the recent years of holiday display at the Festival of Lights in Riverside Park, hundreds have discovered the really unique method of enjoying a winter's evening: park in the Frog Island parking lot and walk across the 'tridge' to the southern park. Stroll along the paths at river's edge and enjoy a point of view not possible from a heated and steaming automobile. Walkers report the most romantic time is at the beginning of an evening's snowfall and several local couples tell of getting engaged on just such a winter's walk.

Walking down East Cross and North River also affords the participant the opportunity to window shop; something seemingly unknown in today's highway malls. Depot Town's winter windows relfect a homespun warmth at this time of year and virtually none of the displays came from a catalog of glitzy glamor items found in countless mailings throughout the year. Most of ours is agonizingly home-made and installed by the owners' kids.

Walking between and behind the main buildings is another interesting dynamic that just isn't even suggested in most urban areas. Snow shovelers make it clear that the best parking is off the street and, if you get off the main drag, you can find the warmth of a wood fire in a pot-bellied stove in the Freighthouse while shopping the every-Saturday crafts shows which accompany the Farmers' Market until Christmas.

Walking (and talking) are prime activities in this old enclave and that's why the shop and building owners are so conscientious about keeping their sidewalks clear all year 'round.

Happy holidays from all those walkers and talkers down in Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town. When they say "Take a walk," they mean together -- around the neighborhood!

Our only Old-Fashioned Ice Cream Parlor

Miller's Since 1890
ICE CREAM
Ice Cream Parlor and Emporium
42 East Cross

Over 30 Flavors!
• Yogurt • Sherbet • Sundaes
• Malts & Shakes
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• Cards and Gifts
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• Catering
• Serving lunches
485-7546

Sun-Th 8 am - 9 pm, Fri-Sat 8 am - 10 pm

D.T.A. President's message:

Recently, I was learning back in my chair with my feet kicked up thinking about nothing, a subject of which I'm an expert; when all of a sudden an event in my childhood came flashing back like it was yesterday.

It was a week before Christmas in the City of Northville and the local hardware store had its annual visit from Santa Claus on its second floor. During the regular business year, this second floor space probably was used for storage but during the Christmas Season it was transformed into a child's dream; a toy land. As if the colorful and eye-level toys weren't enough to excite a young boy or girl, this enterprising business owner added holiday music to set the purchase mood.

The mood was slick. As you made your way up the stairs to the second floor, the first thing that hit you was the music, then your eyes glazed down a runway with toys stacked from the floor to the ceiling on both sides of the aisle. At the end of the runway was Santa looking just as you expected he would; dressed in red and considerably fat. As you walked down the aisle the price of toys kept getting more expensive, so when you reached Santa, here, smack in front of your eyes, were the big ticket items. This business owner was not a fool. He was prospering in small town America.

But times have changed since I was a kid. Toys 'R' Us, a national discount chain, now dominates the toy market and can sell the same toy cheaper than the local hardware store can buy it wholesale. Granted, this is a good deal for the consumer; but how does the small business owner respond to his new competition? And what is the effect of the small business owner's response on his downtown business community? How should businesses in the City of Ypsilanti respond to the realities of the 90's?

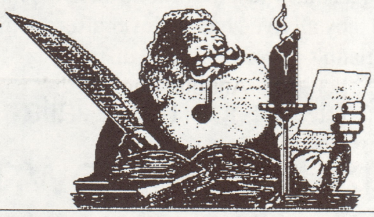
These are the questions that a person who professes to be an expert on nothing surely doesn't have an answer for. Perhaps it's time for our business organization, dedicated to creating a positive business environment in its community, to attempt to answer these questions by becoming active in developing a plan that will stabilize, then revitalize our business districts.

If not, maybe we can borrow Santa and his little helpers from the hardware store in Northville to occupy some of our empty storefronts. - Bill French, your prez

Holiday special: Give a subscription to the monthly *Depot Town Rag*

A $10 Associate Membership not only gives you the opportunity of voting and working, but you'll receive all these corny stories about how "Depot Town *is* what America *was*" for the next twelve months.

Send to: **The Depot Town Association, Inc.**
The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198



Name _____

Address _____

City, State, ZIP _____

Make $10 check payable to *"Depot Town Association, Inc."*

Advertising/sponsorship opportunity outside Depot Town environs:

Place your business's copy in
The Depot Town Rag
for only $10 a month and you'll get:

- Your business name and specials placed before the most loyal clientele in Washtenaw County
- A classy sticker to place on your door to let your clientele know that you're an active supporter of Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town
- 1500 promotions a month through our regular readers
- A loyal readership of cult followers who are intersted in the same kind of corny, home town stuff that you are
- More intimate exposure than any daily or tabloid can offer
- Copies of *The Rag* to distribute to clients and customers
- The opportunity to make monthly changes in your ad copy
- 10% off the cost if you pay for 1992 in one payment
- Monthly or quarterly payment plans

RESPOND TO:
The editor
The Depot Town Rag
25 1/2 East Cross Street
Ypsilanti, MI 48198
or call 482-6371

Have a Happy, Healthy Holiday Season!

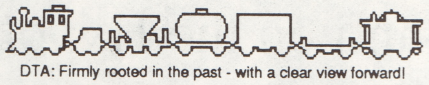
YPSI FOOD CO-OP
Sun. 12-5, M,T,Th, F 10-7 Wed. 10-9 Sat. 9-7
312 N. RIVER ST. 483-1520

Blind Pig
208 S. FIRST ST.
ANN ARBOR, MI
SALOON

Mr. Goo's Car Wash
317 E. MICHIGAN AVE.

Depot Town Association, Inc., 21 November 1991

Eleven members attended the back room meeting at Miller's Ice Cream Parlor.



DTA: Firmly rooted in the past - with a clear view forward!

Minutes of October corrected to place Halloween in the right month.

Treasury is $4711.29. Need to work out loss on Frog pins.

Freighthouse Committee reports many family events planned for that facility. Quilt show is still a possibility.

Winter Blues & Jazz series will take place the third Saturday in February and March with a $1500 artists' budget, over $4000 in total expenses. Tickets are set at $12.50 advance, $13.50 day of event. Artists will be announced by December 5.

Channel 56 needs DTA's help in pledge drives. Bonni Rosen-Fine will make connections.

Caboose window repairs and cupola repairs estimated.

$576 profit from Jazz t-shirts is transferred to the general fund.

$1237.38 from Jazz line item is transferred to the general fund.

The Crossing Guard Tower, under construction though November, is ready for shingles, windows and trim. Weather permitting, it may still get painted this season; if not, consider wrapping it in for the winter. $100 limit approved for placement of a 'thank you' sign for the construction effort: "Thank you: Roland Sizemore, Jr., the Depot Town Antique Engine Club, David Davis, DTA and friends of Depot Town."

DTA will purchase a new telephone answering machine to reactivate the **482-YPSI Hot Line.**

Victorian Holiday parade set for December 14. See page one.

Festival of Lights' DTA tree and program book were questioned. Judy Monaghan will verify.

A medical bill of $50 from Heritage Jazz Competition is paid.

Cookie Lady, Bonni Rosen-Fine, proposes 2nd annual cookie event for decision in December and is hoping for donations of prizes.

New street lights are being studied to unify and characterize the district. At $2000 per pole plus other expenses, the cost could be more than $100,000. More study and reports later.

An outdoor bulletin board was discussed for placement in the Market Plaza.

Shoppers' Surveys will be collected by Judy Monaghan from the district businesses, conduct the monthly drawings, and announce the winners.

Rag Report: Gerry Tillman, Bettie Dodd, Judy Monaghan and Bill French will assist with distribution in the *Rag's* ever-growing circulation area. Bill French will continue as the paper's sales manager. Five new businesses from in and out of the district have requested inclusion.

Thanks to the **City DPW crew** for removing the bee's nest in the tree above the Caboose.

New members: Doris Moxley, Ed & Bonni Rosen Fine, Joan Weber

A special Associate membership coupon accompanies this issue to provide US mail delivery of *The Rag* to our readers.

December 1991

Depot Towners are invited to participate in any or all of the following activities for the good of this old commercial district:

Depot Town Association
7:30 p.m. Thursday, 12/191
The Old Caboose

Depot Town
Antique Engine Club 12/14
6:30 p.m. Saturday,
Freighthouse Coffeeshop

1991-1992 officers

President	A. William French	483-1870
Vice president	Dave Blackmer	485-7546
Secretary/editor	Tom Dodd	482-6371
Treasurer	Bettie Dodd	482-6371

Standing Committees

Membership	Bonni Rosen-Fine	482-3463
Events	Carolyn McKeever	483-4256
Rag sales	A. William French	483-1870
Freighthouse	Margaret Harner	482-6373
Heritage Festival	Steve Gross	482-1780

You can rent
The Old Caboose

($25 + deposit) **Call 483-4256.**

Announcing the return of
the Depot Town
WINTER BLUES & Jazz!
Series
Saturday, February 15, 1992
Saturday, March 21, 1992
in the Freighthouse

December events in the Freighthouse:

1 - Estate Auction
7 - Market Holiday Bazaar
7 - Antique Engine Club party
8 - Food Co-op party
14 - Market Holiday Bazaar
15 - Granite Line Poetry
21 - Market Holiday Bazaar
21 - Serenity House dance
28 - Amick wedding
31 - Contra Dance

This month's survey winners:

Nikki Gray
Sheila Farret

each won dinner for two at either
Aubree's Saloon
or
The Sidetrack

THE DEPOT TOWN RAG

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc. a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate.

-Tom Dodd, editor

The Depot Town Association, Inc.
A. William French, president
c/o The Old Caboose
400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Edifice Complex:

Local History that Never Happened

Before the Sign Ordinance

Today's formula for signs on the fronts of commercial buildings which dictates that only 98.7% of a facade may be covered with neon and plastic was only a dream of the future when these broadsides were erected on the facade of Hillary's Hotel, Billiards Parlor and Tanning Salon in a nearby community.

This period of wooden signs was followed by the ScotchGuard double-reflective glass bead signage carnage which displays roadside history from Detroit to Chicago. Once the Ypsilanti Historic District was created, hardly anyone continued directly between the two cities any more. A special turn-off was erected along the Interstate Highway and preservationists around the country have since coined the phrase, "The Ypsilanti Turn-Off."

SALOON

35 East Cross Street

Since 1873

Trade a paperback for one of Barb's for only 70c plus tax! Crazy!

Crazy Barb's

Paperback Book Exchange!

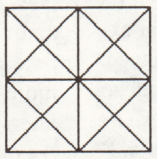
Mon-Sat 11am-6pm

50 East Cross **484-4564**

Diagonals considered - a new angle on things

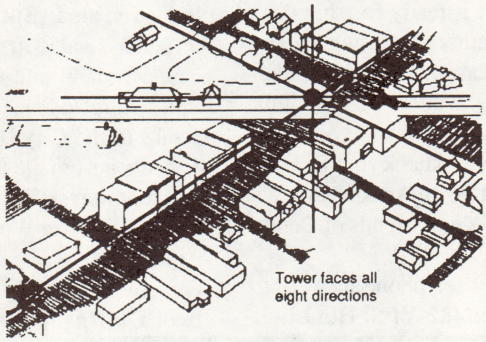
Ypsilanti on the Hypotenuse

No sooner did the reconstructors reach the second level of the Crossing Guard Tower at the corner of Cross, River and the railroad tracks, than they realized why that level was octagonal. At that moment, the heretofore crazy angles of Michigan Avenue, Washtenaw, Miles and Ecorse streets made every kind of sense to today's travellers.



On the ground level, the tower is parallel to the tracks but, when you ascend to the eight-sided platform, half the windows align with the municipal grid plan of streets. The railroad, of course, followed the level banks of the Huron River - which had been here long before the north/south, east/west grid of streets was laid out. Hence, the crossing guard could look up the tracks at one angle and predict the coming of the trains in time to warn the pedestrian and vehicular traffic on the city's grid pattern of streets and sidewalks.

In his 1976 *Depot Town Study* (at right), Richard Macias lined up all his drawings with the railroad track as the baseline and the streets running on the diagonal—much in the manner that towns are seen from the cab of a freight train. He switched the point of view on those who were accustomed to seeing the streets as the base and the tracks as the inconsistent element.



The aforementioned streets, however, followed the natural topography in much the same manner as the railroad. Michigan Avenue slices off toward Saline and Chicago, following the Sauk Trail which skirted the 'smile' below the dense north woods. Washtenaw Avenue diagonals up along the interurban line to newer and trendier Ann Arbor. Miles Street merely ran along the north side of the tracks to make a shortcut and avoid building another bridge. Ecorse Road makes a unique connection to the Downriver communities which are usually thought to be downriver from Detroit, but are equally downriver on the Huron, that waterway which so heavily influenced the discovery and development of all this activity in the Michigan Territory and drew the attention of early railroad developers to the Western Frontier.

Students of genetics know the value of thinking in threes and the hypotenuse of the triangle often surprises us after we've been thinking in twos for so long. True/false, right/wrong, win/lose, positive/negative, pass/fail; all such duality seems to fit with our bipolar physical system. Perhaps having two eyes, ears, hands, feet, and more bi-pendages causes us to think in modes which suggest only two possibilities. But when we consider that there is always at least a *third* alternative, we begin to consider the elegance of the triangle.

Recipes for lemonade , great comedy teams, the Christian Trinity, Prang's theory of color, and countless other triads remind us that there's always another way of looking at things. That three-ness even allows a square to become an octogon as seen in the tower's second level.

So many people have come by during the reconstruction of the tower to tell the workers about their relatives who worked in that tower that those ancestors must have been constantly aware of the fact that the strong diagonal is what gives strength and rigidity to the fabric of life here along the railroad tracks in Depot Town. Whether it's the crossmember added to the balloon frame wall or centering of wet clay on the potter's wheel, the strength of the diagonal is paramount. Designers of the 'shadow' signs installed this year in and around the district recall that same dynamic. Look at the combination of triangular planes and find their roots in the design of the top of the new/old tower. Then imagine how much more dull those same elements would have been had they been aligned to the alternative plane. (You're going to have to get out on the street to accomplish this feat!)

Those crafty Victorians certainly took the time and thought to create a dynamic and intricate design. Thanks to the many who took time to make it appear again, we can examine that conscious diagonal design and threeness in application to today's too easily perceived right/leftness. Such thoughtful design is not often found in the today's strip city development.

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48 East Cross Street
in Historic Depot Town

A Depot Town SAMPLER

Newest sponsors caught on late

It was during its fourteenth year of publication that the Same Old Crowd in the caboose wondered about placing a form of classified advertising in their own publication. "Could you put a note in next month's *Rag* about the availability of our apartment up over the store?" asked one of the regulars at the Depot Town Association's third Thursday meeting.

Sometimes the obvious answer isn't so obvious. Most of the people around the table just stared at each other in near disbelief. "Why not advertise our own rental properties in the district?" they pondered. After all, they (the Depot Town Association) *own* this little monthly; it's their 'house organ,' so to speak. And why not, they asked themselves, hustle their own rentals in the same paper which boasts of their many creative businesses up and down the block?!

So they tried it. They added a little square to the bottom of the back page and called attention to store fronts which were considerably under the market value at the strip malls and enjoyed such a happier and more traditional clientele. And they announced the few available apartment rentals which appeared over the year.

One landlady reported that the calls she received were all from people who already knew the area; that's how they found them in *The Rag*. And they all lived happily ever after -- down in Ypsilanti's historic railroad district.

Rental properties available
in Depot Town

APARTMENT:
2nd floor, one bedroom, one person,
newly rebuilt w/ carpet, appliances
$360 mo. (first, last, half security)

•

One small 1 bedroom = $299

•

One efficiency - $385

•

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